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I. Hub Highlights

Littoral States Agree To Fight Oil Pollution In Caspian Sea

February 9. Mehr News Agency, Tehran. The Caspian Sea littoral states have eventually reached agreement on a cooperation protocol to fight oil pollution in the largest lake in the world. The protocol, one of the attached protocols of Tehran Convention, has been discussed and approved by the five Caspian littoral states in a meeting in Moscow and it will be presented in Kazakhstan's capital Astana late in summer for final ratification, Sa'id Izadian of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization said. Tehran Convention is the first regional cooperation agreement for the protection of the Caspian Sea environment, which was ratified by the five littoral states in 2003 in Tehran after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Izadian explained. The convention has eight protocols, four of which have been ratified by the littoral states so far, he said. The four protocols include the protocol on the protection against pollution from land resources, oil pollution, the protocol on the conservation of biodiversity and the protocol on environmental impact assessment

(EIA) in trans-boundary context, he added. Tehran Convention aims at protecting the Caspian Sea environment from all sources of pollution and protecting, preserving and restoring the marine environment. The convention includes provisions on sustainable and rational use of the bio diversity of the Caspian Sea, as well as environmental monitoring, research and development.

Uzbekistan Remote Village Bio-Gas Demonstration Project

The remote mountain village of Khumsan has a bio-gas demonstration project, using primitive technology that converts livestock manure into bio-gas and provides four participating families with electricity, heat, and gas. It is designed to last ten years without repairs or spare parts. The village is not connected to the power grid, and converters such as this one are the only feasible sources of energy for the villagers other than the nearby rapidly depleting forest. NGO Ecoforum of Uzbekistan, which helped fund this bio-gas project (and which also received a US Embassy Tashkent grant), also wants to develop ecotourism to scenic mountains and remote villages, but villagers are skeptical and want to know how they will benefit. Tourists need a place to stay that also has heat and electricity, and Ecoforum thinks ecotourism cannot be developed without alternative energy in villages and mountain regions. While the project is very impressive, it is still too expensive at present.



Kazakhstan: MFA Refutes Any Involvement In Uranium Deal With Iran

Khabar (official, nationwide): In an official statement, MFA said: ““Having voluntarily renounced the world's fourth nuclear missile arsenal and having closed the world's second largest nuclear testing site in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan is one of the internationally recognized leaders of the global process of disarmament and non-proliferation... As a non-nuclear state, our country has strictly followed the regulations of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, the appropriate UNSC resolutions, as well as the principles and rules of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.”

Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Mull Uniting Their Energy Systems

February 11. Asia-Plus News Agency. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are considering the possibility of uniting their energy systems, the Kazakh ambassador to Tajikistan, Abutalip Akhmetov, told journalists at a news conference in Dushanbe today. He said that the break of the united Central Asian energy system is a temporary phenomenon. (NOTE: We should recall that on 1 December 2009 Uzbekistan cut its connection to the transmission line through which it used to provide electricity to a portion of Tajikistan, thereby prompting charges it was withdrawing from the united energy system breaking the single energy ring of the region.) "Withdrawal from the united energy system inflicts damage not only on a country which withdrew from the system but also on all countries of the region. The system helped to carry out energy exchange during hard times," the diplomat said. The ambassador said that the energy ministries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are holding talks on the construction of electricity transmission lines from the Kyrgyz town of Osh to the Tajik town of Khujand which will make it possible to unite energy systems of the three countries in future. "We should always have an alternative. It is not because somebody withdrew from the united energy system or joined it. Today we have large demands for electricity," the Kazakh ambassador said. The Kazakh ambassador also said that, while chairing the OSCE in 2010, Kazakhstan would seriously consider issues related to water distribution in Central Asia.

Turkmen Gas Has Reached Beijing

On January 30, the Government-owned newspaper "Neutral Turkmenistan" published an article entitled "Turkmen Gas Has Reached Beijing." The article cites various Chinese media outlets as stating that the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) began pumping Turkmen gas from the Horgos station at the Kazakh-Chinese border to the Jingbian station via the newly-built western segment of the Second West-East gas pipeline and that the gas had successfully reached Beijing through the Shaan-Jing gas pipeline. Both the Second West-East and the Shaan-Jing pipelines are located inside China and are part of the Chinese gas transportation system, designed to transport Turkmen gas from the Central Asia-China gas pipeline to central and eastern parts of China.

USAID and Its Grantee Launched the Health Outreach Program in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

In late January, USAID and PSI officially launched the Health Outreach Program in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The program provides technical assistance, training, and services to increase access to quality HIV and tuberculosis prevention and treatment interventions among the most at-risk populations. According to international experts, Central Asia's HIV infection rates are some of the fastest-growing throughout the world. The most common method of HIV transmission in the region is infection by needles/syringes, while the main risk factors are drug use and unprotected sexual contact. Through its activities, the project will seek to stop and reverse the increase in the infection rates among drug users and sex-industry workers stresses. In Kyrgyzstan, the program will conduct its activities in Chui, Osh, and Djalal-Abad provinces and the cities Bishkek and Osh. In Tajikistan, the program will work in Dushanbe, Vahdat, Kulob, Kurgan Tube, and Soghd areas.

II. Other News

Afghanistan

Afghanistan Interested In Joint Energy Projects With Tajikistan

February 15. Avesta. A project to construct a 220-kilovolt power transmission line Sangtuda-Pol-e Khomri will be completed within ten months, Afghan Minister of Water and Energy Mohammad Esmael Khan told a news conference in Dushanbe today following his meeting with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon. It should be recalled that earlier the Tajik side requested Afghanistan to speed up the construction of the power transmission line in its territory and launch it this May. After the 220-kilovolt power transmission line Sangtuda-Pol-e Khomri is inaugurated, Tajik electricity imports to Afghanistan will be 300 MW, the Afghan minister said. "After the line is constructed, electricity from Tajikistan will be supplied up to the Afghan capital via Takhar and Baghlan provinces. Then the project will be continued up to the Pakistani border," the minister added. The project, which is being implemented by an Indian company in Afghanistan, costs 27.7m dollars, he said.

Afghanistan Dreams of an East-West Highway

Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Works recently presented donors a formal proposal for an east-west highway, one of the most ambitious and expensive infrastructure projects proposed in the post-Taliban era. The road would create a trade and development corridor stretching from the Iranian to Pakistani borders and a shorter alternative to the nearly complete ring road. With an estimated cost above \$1 billion, extensive donor outreach and coordination will be necessary to ensure this signature project is funded and completed.

Afghanistan Electricity Sector Commercialization

The U.S. Government plans to invest approximately \$750 million in energy projects in Afghanistan over the next five years. These projects will significantly increase power generation, increase the efficiency of transmission and distribution, improve capacity to operate and maintain infrastructure, and provide increased access to electricity to Afghans across the country. Energy projects will lead to improvements in agriculture, health, education, economic development, and can contribute to improved revenue flow for the Government of Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan

Food Security and Scientific Centers As National Priorities

In President Nazarbayev's State of The Nation Address on January 29, 2010, he noted that Kazakhstan's priorities included "ensuring food security of the country," whereby "domestic food products should comprise more than 80% of internal market by 2014." In his vision of the "economy of the future," Nazarbayev said three new scientific research centers will be established this year as part of the New University in Astana: the Life Sciences Center, which "will conduct research jointly with the leading world scientific centers in the sphere of organ transplantation, artificial heart and lungs, stem cells and the medicine of longevity"; the Energy Research Center, "dealing with issues of renewable energy sources, physics and high energy technologies"; and the Interdisciplinary Instrumental Center, which "will be an engineering center, and will include laboratory facilities and a design bureau". He said all three centers will be established this year.

Green Party To Be Set Up In Kazakhstan

February 9. Interfax-Kazakhstan. The Kazakh party Rukhaniyat (Spirituality), which is loyal to the authorities, will be transformed into a green party. The leader of the party, Altynshash Zhaganova, and the head of the public foundation Zhasyldar/Greens.kz, Serikzhan Mambetalin, announced such a plan at a news conference in Almaty today during which Altynshash Zhaganova introduced Serikzhan Mambetalin as the leader of the green branch of the Rukhaniyat party. "Today, we are actually announcing the formation of the green party in Kazakhstan," Serikzhan Mambetalin said. According to him, there are many non-governmental organizations in the country that deal with environmental problems such as Tabigat, Globus, Ecoforum and Zelenoye Spaseniye. However, "NGOs deal with their own issues and projects; and the issue of setting up a [green] party arises periodically," he said. "This is being done to ensure that the voice of environmental specialists can be heard from high rostrums and they have their representatives in the legislative branch of the government," Serikzhan Mambetalin said.

Kazakh Ministry Doubts Lawfulness Of Previous Oil Contracts

February 13. Moscow ITAR-TASS. Today the Kazakh Finance Ministry announced that it doubted the lawfulness of oil contracts that are in force in the national energy complex and based on production-sharing principle, the ministry's press release said in London city today. "We have carried out analysis of contracts concluded with foreign companies in the recent years. It showed that there are issues relating to compliance [of these contracts] with a number of existing Kazakh laws," the chairman of the tax committee under the Kazakh Ministry of Finance, Dualet Yergozhin, said today. He said that work on studying the lawfulness of contracts acting on the production-sharing principle would complete by 1 April. Yergozhin refused to name oil companies that drew the Finance Ministry's attention.

Kazakh Industrial Projects Must Not Damage Environment

January 20. Interfax-Kazakhstan. The implementation of industrial projects in Kazakhstan must not damage the environment, Prime Minister Karim Masimov has said. The issue of protecting the environment is under the constant control of the [Kazakh] president who always pays attention to this issue, and economic difficulties must not affect environmental protection, Karim Masimov said at an expanded staff meeting of the Environmental Protection Ministry in Astana today. International practice and developed foreign countries' experience have already worked out good mechanisms that make it possible to nullify industrial development's effect on the environment. This is the best practice, and it should be studied, Karim Masimov said. Close attention should be paid to the environmental aspects of all projects being drawn up when implementing the country's programme of accelerated industrial development, he said. All our industrial processes should be fine-tuned taking into account environmental issues, the prime minister said.

Kazakhstan Looks At New Oil Route To Europe

March 2. The Financial Times. Kazakhstan said it was interested in establishing a new export route to carry its growing surplus of oil across the South Caucasus and the Black Sea to Europe. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakh president, unveiled the oil export scheme after talks with Traian Basescu, Romania's leader, in Astana, the Kazakh capital. He said Kazakh oil could be transported in a new pipeline across Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Black Sea for transport to Romania by tanker. Analysts said Nazarbayev's announcement demonstrated a revival in Kazakh confidence in oil export routes in the South Caucasus that was damaged during a short war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. Georgian pipelines and railways came under attack during the war exposing the vulnerability of energy export routes that have helped Caspian producers end dependence on Russian pipelines. Kazakhstan halted exports through a marine terminal at Batumi on Georgia's Black Sea coast during the war and said it might delay plans to expand the facility. Kazakhstan needs to build new export pipelines to handle an expected surge in oil production after 2012 when the giant Kashagan field comes onstream in the Caspian Sea. Mr Nazarbayev said Kashagan crude delivered to Romania could enter a planned pipeline from the Black Sea port of Constanta to Trieste in Italy. Kazakhstan produced 1.5m barrels a day of oil last year and expects to double output after Kashagan comes onstream. KazMunaigas, Kazakhstan's state oil company, bought Rompetrol, the Romanian oil refining and distribution company, in 2008, establishing a foothold in European oil markets.

New Healthcare System Introduced In Kazakhstan From 1 January 2010

January 2. Interfax-Kazakhstan. Starting from 1 January 2010, Kazakhstan will gradually introduce a single national healthcare system (SNHS). In line with the concept (SNHS), from now on, Kazakhstan's citizens have the right to independently choose a doctor and clinic where they will receive medical aid. However, they can change the clinic no more than once a year. Meanwhile, doctors in localities will not visit patients at home. "If a patient chose a clinic and doctor, he has an opportunity to receive medical service from the clinic," Deputy Health Minister Yelzhan Birtanov said earlier. If the patient needs urgent medical aid, he will get it in the nearest clinic, he specified. At the same time, the country's citizens now can choose not only a clinic but

also a hospital. The system may help develop competition among clinics; 96 per cent of the medical organizations in Kazakhstan are state-owned; Kazakhstan's population exceeds 16 million.

Kyrgyzstan

Bakiyev Faces Protests Over Fuel Bills Hike

February 25. Central Asia Digest. Sharp increases in the price of electricity and central heating have left many in Kyrgyzstan struggling to survive. The price for electricity has already doubled this year and the cost of central heating has shot up by 500%. The Kyrgyz government says it has been forced to cut subsidies and pass on the real cost of utilities to the consumer so as to cope with the effects of the world economic crisis and to build up funds to invest in the energy sector. Officials say it costs more to generate electricity and provide hot water than business and domestic customers pay. The increases match the cost price, they say. Consumers are less than enamored of the scheme. A straw poll of 63 people conducted by Institute of War and Peace Reporting on the streets of Bishkek produced a unanimously negative response. "What have I got to be happy about?" said a female pensioner who lives on her own. "I get 2,500 soms [US\$56] a month ... I don't have enough to live on. And now they've added on 130 soms and I'll have to pay 350 soms [monthly] for hot water."

USAID Launches Global Development Alliance with Eurasia Group in Kyrgyzstan

Recently, USAID and the Eurasia Group LLC Switzerland launched a partnership aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and food security in Kyrgyzstan by boosting yields of corn and the production of sunflower oil. It is estimated that by the end of 2010, an additional 8,000 metric tons of corn for livestock fodder and 480 metric tons of processed, edible sunflower oil will be added to Kyrgyzstan's food balance at a reduced cost to the consumer. This program will narrow the supply gap for both commodities and also foster foreign and domestic investment by private sector companies into the agriculture sector in Kyrgyzstan. USAID has committed \$400,000 and the Eurasia Group - \$550,000 to the program. The program will be implemented by the USAID-funded Kyrgyz Agro-Input Enterprise Development Project and Eurasia Group, Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyz Leader Says 100m Dollars Of Russian Loan To Be Used To Build Power Plant

February 15. Bishkek AKIpress Online. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev said Russia's 150m-dollar grant to Kyrgyzstan would be fully channelled into supporting the budget. Bakiyev said the loan worth 300 dollars with an annual interest rate of 0.75 per cent and a 40-year grace period would be given to the Development Fund, in particular, to provide loans for agricultural producers through a new microcredit company. The head of state added that 100m dollars would be invested in constructing the Kambar-Ata 2 hydroelectric power plant.

Chinese Language Education in Kyrgyzstan

The Chinese have opened two Confucius Centers in Kyrgyzstan, at Kyrgyz National University and Bishkek Humanities University. The major goal of the centers is to promote the study of Chinese, and at Bishkek Humanities University alone, over 2,000 students major in Chinese. The Confucius Center at Bishkek Humanities has two well-equipped libraries with internet access and a language lab with 40 audio-visual cubicles for Chinese language study. The Confucius Center also organizes festivals, distributes Russian and Chinese-language publications about China (including a Russian-language periodical, "Kontimost," which is distributed throughout the former Soviet Union), sponsors language immersion camps for students, offers Chinese language testing, and organizes trips to China. Every year, there is an international conference for all 250 Confucius Centers worldwide and the directors of both the university and the Confucius Center are invited to attend.

2,772 Thousand HIV Registered In Kyrgyzstan

March 03. 24.kg. According to the United Nations Development Program report, "Government support in HIV/AIDS problems," a total of 2,772 HIV infects were registered in Kyrgyzstan as of February 2010, and most are young people.

Tajikistan

Roghun Shakedown: Tajiks Forced to Buy Shares in Dam

February 26. Tajik citizens and businesses from all walks of life have been asked to buy shares in the Roghun Hydroelectric dam, which officially went on sale January 6. While the share sales are supposed to be voluntary, according to numerous reports, many citizens are being forced to buy shares. Many teachers, doctors, professors, and government officials have been told they risk losing their jobs if they fail to contribute. Other citizens have been threatened with various retaliatory measures if they don't join the campaign. Even Tajiks outside of Tajikistan have been affected: The Tajik Embassy in Beijing spent 47,000 somoni, with the Ambassador proudly declaring, "The acquisition of Roghun shares and contribution to the acceleration of its construction is the duty of every patriotic citizen of our country, no matter where he lives at the present time." Businesses have leapt over themselves to publicize their contributions. Many state-owned companies that have complained of cash flow problems have managed to make significant contributions. The Talco aluminum plant, Tajikistan's largest exporter, has reportedly purchased \$5 million in shares and pledged to buy another \$20 million soon. Yet Talco says it does not have the money to repay debts to state electricity provider Barqi Tojik totaling \$30 million. As a result, Barqi Tojik says it has fallen behind on its payments to the Sangtuda-1 hydropower station, which has cut production, leaving Tajik homes that much darker.

Tajikistan Receives Humanitarian Aid From Kazakhstan

February 12. Avesta. In all, 53 wagons with humanitarian aid from Kazakhstan arrived in Tajikistan today, the Avesta news agency reported on 12 February, quoting the Tajik Foreign Ministry. The aid comprises 1,000 tonnes of rice and 1.5 tonnes of vegetable oil given by the

Kazakh government to Tajikistan, the report said. The humanitarian aid will be allocated to the needy strata of Tajikistan's population, the report added.

Turkmenistan Sends Humanitarian Aid to Tajikistan

February 14. gundogar.org. With neighboring Uzbekistan punishing Tajikistan over the believed impact of the Rogun hydropower station on its cotton industry by cutting gas deliveries in half, Turkmenistan is trying to position itself as a peace-maker, sending half a million dollars worth of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan in the form of fuel and children's clothing.

Turkmenistan

USAID Continues Promoting the Use of Computer Technologies

A group of Turkmen Agricultural University postgraduate students recently completed computer training, organized by the USAID Project for Promotion of Information Communication in Turkmenistan together with the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan. This USAID-sponsored initiative is a continuation of the USAID Internet Access and Training Program. The new project is already working with the educational sector in the country to strengthen the computer skills of educators and students to access, exchange, and present up-to-date information in the country. The training took place at the USAID Internet Center for Interactive Multimedia Learning that was opened at the Academy of Sciences last year. The project is implemented by IREX.

Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey: A New Phase in Energy Competition?

January 6. Stratfor. Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz joined Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov at the Jan. 6 inauguration ceremony for a natural gas pipeline running from Turkmenistan to Iran. Yildiz's presence raises the possibility that new energy routes and players could create fierce competition in the region.

This pipeline's debut had been planned for quite some time. However, Yildiz's presence at the ceremony raises the possibility that new energy routes and players could significantly alter the region's energy dynamic and create fierce competition.

The new natural gas pipeline is the second energy link between Turkmenistan and Iran. Iran previously imported 6 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas annually from Turkmenistan. With the new pipeline, that amount is set to increase to 12 bcm in 2010 and then to as much as 18-20 bcm in 2011. The new pipeline is part of Turkmenistan's strategy to diversify its export markets after a pipeline break disrupted shipments to its main energy export market, Russia, in April 2009 (natural gas flows have yet to resume). Though the natural gas that will be sent to Iran through the new pipeline is just a fraction of the 50-60 bcm per year that Turkmenistan previously sent to Russia, it gives Ashgabat a financial reprieve, since Turkmenistan depends on energy exports for most of its government revenues. Turkmenistan also recently debuted another pipeline, with a capacity of 30 bcm, which runs to China.

These new pipelines typically would unnerve Russia, which is wary of other powers like China and Iran challenging Moscow's influence over Turkmenistan. However, when the global economic recession drove European natural gas demand down, Russia simply did not need Turkmenistan's exports (which it would then sell to the Europeans at a much higher price). Because Russia's own natural gas supplies were more than sufficient to meet Europe's needs, Moscow allowed the new pipelines to be completed. Russia also knew full well that it still had a say in these new projects, since it controls much of Turkmenistan's energy infrastructure.

Although the pipelines to China and Iran fulfill Turkmenistan's need for export markets other than Russia, they also raise the question of what will happen when European and Russian demand for natural gas returns to previous levels in the next few years. At that point, Turkmenistan's pipelines could be operating at full capacity, sending 50 bcm or more to Iran and China annually. This would leave Turkmenistan unable to meet the Europeans' needs — if demand returns to the levels before the drop — at its current production capacity of 70 bcm. Thus, this could easily turn into a messy competition among several players for Turkmenistan's natural gas — signs of which are already visible.

Enter Turkey. Turkey has long been discussed as a potential energy transit country, due to its strategic location joining the European and Asian continents. The Europeans have courted Turkey as a potential energy transport route for projects like Nabucco, which would bring Central Asian, Caspian and Middle Eastern energy supplies to the continent and circumvent Russia. The Russians, meanwhile, see Turkey as key to making sure the Europeans remain dependent on Russia for energy through potential projects like South Stream.

Therefore, the Turkish energy minister's presence at the Turkmenistan-Iran pipeline inauguration is noteworthy. Turkey is waking up from a near century-long diplomatic slumber and is looking to raise its profile in strategic areas. One such area is the Middle East, and a key country with which Turkey already has an energy and trade relationship is Iran. Turkey imports a small amount of natural gas from Iran and has made clear its intention to transfer Iranian natural gas to Europe. Iran's geographical location makes it a very attractive alternative to Russia for energy supplies destined for Europe, and it has heavy volumes of its own natural gas (though most current production is used for domestic consumption) and vast untapped reserves.

Of course, Iran's controversial nuclear program creates massive political complications in getting Iran involved in such a deal right now, but this is not to preclude its participation in the future. Central Asia — and specifically Turkmenistan — contains one of the world's largest supplies of natural gas, and the Turkmenistan-Iran pipeline now brings that natural gas considerably closer to Turkey. From Turkey, there are no serious obstacles to getting that natural gas to Europe. Yildiz's presence at the Turkmenistan-Iran pipeline inauguration indicates that the Turks are very aware of that. But Russia is also aware, and will make sure that its voice is heard as competition over energy routes and supplies in the region heats up.

Uzbekistan

Uzbek Leader Says Key Energy Projects 'Biggest Achievement' In 2009

January 29. Tashkent Uzbek Television First Channel. Speaking at a meeting of the Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers on 29 January, President Islam Karimov has described construction of some new power lines as "the biggest achievement." The Uzbek president's speech was dedicated to summing up the results of 2009 and outlining priority tasks in 2010. He said that the government's anti-crisis programme for 2009-2012 has played an important role in mitigating and liquidating the crisis's effects. Speaking about tasks for 2010, the president said that ensuring stability of financial and banking systems remains one of the main priority tasks. He also noted that global financial institutions have recognized Uzbekistan's economic achievements during the global financial crisis.

USAID: Humanitarian Shipments Enhance Food Security among Vulnerable Uzbek Populations

USAID, Resource and Policy Exchange, Inc., and a local organization, Sog'lom Avlod Uchun, launched the USAID Food for Peace Project in Uzbekistan last week. This program will work through August 2010 to enhance food security among vulnerable medical beneficiaries including children with different disabilities and tuberculosis patients. The program has already brought in the first shipment - 75 metric tons of enriched food that will be provided to 60 social and medical institutions across Uzbekistan. The shipment includes dehydrated vegetable blends enriched with vitamins and minerals and will be used to prepare soup for 13,000 residents of these institutions. USAID has already funded similar programs in Uzbekistan in 2004 and 2007.

New Computer Network Supports Forensic Science

A secure wireless computer network was installed at the Main Forensic Bureau of the Uzbek Ministry of Health with assistance from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and the Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program. This important upgrade is a part of the ongoing effort to help the Main Forensic Bureau conform to international standards of forensic science. The ultimate goal of this program is to uphold the rule of law in Uzbekistan by enabling forensic scientists to provide the hard evidence that is at the heart of any successful criminal investigation.

Uzbekistan Increases Electric Power Export To Afghanistan

January 19. Moscow Regnum. The Guzor-Surxon PTL-500 [power transmission line] has reached its designed capacity, and the export potential of the facility rose six-fold only a month after it was commissioned, a Regnum Novosti news agency correspondent reported quoting the chairman of the enterprise Janubiy Magistral Elektr Tarmoqlari (southern main electric power networks), Xasan Qoziyev, as saying. Qoziyev said that the construction of this high-voltage 500 kV power transmission line, which extends for 197 km, cost 128m dollars. "But the economic effect of the facility, which was commissioned at the beginning of December 2009, is expected to be great for Surxondaryo [southern Uzbek region], as well as for the rest of the

country," the source said. Qoziyev drew attention to the fact that the export power supply to Afghanistan had been increased from 25 to 150 MW during this short period of time. "Now, 2.3m kWh of electricity is being provided daily to Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul. Moreover, in order to make this possible, in the summer of last year, the Uzbekenergo state joint stock company built a 45-km-long line, which extends from the Surxon substation to Hairatan in Afghanistan," the source concluded. (**NOTE:** It was the completion of the Guzor-Surxon transmission line that allowed Uzbekistan to cut its link to that portion of Tajikistan served by the Nurek hydroelectric plant. Previously, Uzbekistan had imported electricity from this region of Tajikistan during summer months.)

III. Regional News Clips

Note: Baktiyor Mukhamadiev's excellent **Weekly Central Asian ESTH News**, sent from our Tashkent office, contains most of the news events that are happening in the region. This section modestly supplements his reporting.

Nabucco Gas Pipeline Will Succeed – US Analyst

February 25. news.az. In an interview with news.az, Hailey Cook, Washington-based coordinator for the Turkish Foundation for Political, Social and Economic Research, says age-old disputes and contemporary geopolitical alliances make the Nabucco context a complex one. The U.S. is wary of a visible increase in cooperation in energy security and economic projects between Turkmenistan, Turkey, and Iran, and does not see a place for Iranian gas in the Southern Corridor, she says. Of course, Turkey and Azerbaijan still have to agree on transit fees. Increasingly, the Caspian region is seen as the center of the world's transport of oil and natural gas, with a new catch phrase that "natural gas is the oil of the future." The challenges will require three components of energy security policy, says Cook: a comprehensive regional policy involving the regional powers themselves agreeing; and a flexible yet consistent policy from the EU and US on the region with engagement of both NATO and OSCE; and diversification. The West still sees a capacity for Nabucco to pipe natural gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to central Europe, circumventing Russia and Iran. The U.S. has failed to appoint an ambassador to Azerbaijan, sending a message that it does not view stability in the region as urgent. Cook praised Turkmenistan for already pursuing a policy of diversification. Nabucco will be on shaky ground if Russia accesses more Azerbaijani gas, she says. The cheaper and more viable South Stream projects transporting gas from Russia via the Black Sea and bypassing Ukraine could still compete for international attention.

Belarus To Help Tajikistan Build Power Plants

February 10. Dushanbe Tajik Television First Channel. A meeting between Belarusian businessmen [who arrived in Tajikistan under the leadership of a deputy Belarusian industry

minister, Uladzimir Swiderski] and top officials from the Tajik Ministry of Economic Development and Trade took place in Dushanbe today. The meeting was arranged as part of cooperation and intergovernmental relations between the two friendly countries. The meeting expressed satisfaction with multifaceted cooperation and discussed issues of bilateral cooperation as well as trade and economic relations. It was noted that the Belarusian side will take an active part in developing cooperation in such sectors as energy, communications and transport. It was pointed out that Belarus would provide technical assistance in building large hydro-energy facilities of Tajikistan.

Kazakhstan May Take Part In Construction Of Tajik Power Plant

February 11. Dushanbe Asia-Plus. Kazakhstan may take part in the construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power station only after conducting international examination of feasibility study of this power plant, the Kazakh ambassador to Tajikistan, Abutalip Akhmetov, said at a news conference in Dushanbe today. He said that Kazakhstan's participation in this project fully depends on the Tajik side. "The Tajik government has made a decision to independently build this huge energy facility. However, if the Tajik government asks us to take part in the examination or the construction of this facility Kazakhstan is ready to accept such a proposal," Abutalip Akhmetov said. The diplomat pointed out that the Kazakh leadership treats the construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power station with respect and supports Tajikistan in this issue. Meanwhile, the ambassador said that the joint Tajik-Kazakh investment fund with capital of 100m dollars would start working in the nearest days. "This fund will make it possible for Tajikistan to implement projects in such sectors as energy and construction because the fund is fully oriented to [the development] of the Tajik economy," he said.

Iran Paper Analyses Sending Caspian Sea Issue To International Court Of Justice

January 25. Mardom-Salari website, Tehran. While suggesting taking the Mazandaran Sea [Caspian Sea] dossier to the International Court of Justice to resolve the problem, Dr Hermidas Bavand said If the dossier is taken to the International Court of Justice, the share of Iran in Caspian Sea will exceed 20 per cent. According to ISNA [Iranian Student News Agency], in the Monday [4 January] Conference of Discrepancy in Interests in Caspian Sea Threats and Advantages in Front of Iran, expert in international relations Dr Davud Hermidas Bavand has referred to the chronology of Mazandaran Sea and said The collective regime of Mazandaran Sea considers the use of the sea collectively and - in fact - the use of it by a country does not depend on the allowance of another country. Referring to the treaties of 1921 and 1940 on Caspian Sea, he said. The matter of the passage of time is not considered in such a collective regime. It means that any approach undertaken by any country cannot be changed by passing time.

Central Asia Regional Environmental Hub

The Central Asia Regional Environment Officer (REO) is responsible for monitoring and reporting on trans-boundary environment, science, technology, and health issues in six countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan.

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U.S. Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs

[<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/>]

Regional Hub Website and Past Newsletters

[Pending]